

March 23, 2007

**Statement by Congressman Pete Stark
Supporting An Immediate End to the War in Iraq**

Madam Speaker, today's vote is very difficult for me.

I support the immediate withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act is a significant improvement over the President's failed Iraq policies. For years, Bush has sent our troops into harms way without the proper equipment. Today's legislation aims to hold the Administration accountable for its own readiness standards – and for the benchmarks President Bush himself proposed for Iraqi government performance. This bill also goes farther toward providing an actual end date for this war than any other legislation that has reached the House floor.

I applaud Speaker Pelosi, Jack Murtha and Dave Obey for this significant achievement. I wish I could support my Speaker today and vote with the overwhelming majority of my Democratic colleagues. But, I can't vote 'Yes.'

I ran for Congress because of my strong opposition to our government's unyielding commitment to the Vietnam War. I didn't think it made sense for American men and women to die for the half-truths of the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. Today, I don't think it makes any more sense for lives to be lost for the outright lies of the Bush regime.

I voted against the original resolution authorizing the President to take military action against Iraq. At the time, I said I didn't trust this president and his advisors.

During the war's four long years, nothing has happened to convince me otherwise. On the contrary, the Bush Administration has repeatedly misled the American people about Iraq. They lied to Congress about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, about the cost and length of the war, and about meeting arbitrary benchmarks.

Their goalposts keep moving. The amount of money they requested for this supplemental alone is nearly twice the amount they initially projected the war would cost in its entirety.

Throughout my career in Congress, I've voted against defense spending and against war. Building new weapons systems and waging war doesn't solve problems. If the last four years are any indication, it actually makes them worse.

The longer we stay in Iraq, the higher the cost of this senseless war. Unless we withdraw immediately, the Shiite-Sunni civil war will continue taking the lives of additional American troops and Iraqi civilians. Education, health care, and other domestic needs will go under-funded in America while additional billions are spent in Iraq. And our international allies will further doubt our actions and intentions around the world.

Despite my utmost respect for my colleagues who crafted this bill, I can't in good conscience vote to continue this war. Nor, however, can I vote 'No' and join those who think today's legislation goes too far toward withdrawal.

That's why I'm making the difficult decision to vote 'present.' My vote should be interpreted as opposing the war's continuation while permitting this Congress -- under Speaker Pelosi's leadership -- to deliver a strong message to President Bush that his blank check to wage war has been canceled.

I urge my colleagues to vote their consciences and help end the war in Iraq.